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ABSTRACT

The 1991 National Household Education Survey collected information on children's experiences in the home; in home-based child care; in center-based programs, including day care centers and nursery school; and in school. Data were collected by telephone from the parents and guardians of 13,892 children of 3 to 8 years between February and April of 1991. The overall response rate was 76.3 percent. The rationale for the survey was the belief of many experts that children are better prepared for first grade if they have experienced some high quality group care or nursery school. This survey covered the types of child care and early childhood program experiences first and second graders had before they entered first grade. It was found that 28 percent of children enrolled in first or second grade had received nonparental, home-based care by relatives on a regular basis before entering first grade, and 27 percent had received home-based care from nonrelatives. A total of 71 percent of first and second graders had attended center-based programs. Children whose parents had a high school education or less were more likely than other children to enter first grade without a center-based experience. Kindergarten experience was nearly universal. Children whose parents had more than a high school education were less likely to have attended full-day public kindergarten than children whose parents had a high school education or less. (LB)

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Experiences in Child Care and Early Childhood Programs of First and Second Graders

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The 1991 National Household Education Survey (NHES), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, collected information on children's experiences in the home, in home-based child care, in center-based programs including daycare centers and nursery school, and in school. Survey data were collected from the parents or guardians of children 3- to 8-years-old by telephone between February and April of 1991.

The number of children receiving care and education from individuals other than their parents has risen over the years and is expected to continue to rise in the next decade. Many early education experts believe that children are better prepared for first grade if they have experienced some high-quality group care or nursery school. For many young children, enrollment in kindergarten is no longer the first experience with group educational programs. This brief report[1] focuses on the types of child care and early childhood program experiences first and second graders' had prior to entering first grade. More detailed information on the home experiences of young children from the early childhood component of the 1991 NHES is available in other NCES reports.

Home-based Care by Relatives and Nonrelatives

The number of children receiving nonparental child care and enrolling in early childhood education programs before reaching the age of compulsory school attendance reflects the increased demand for nonparental care and education of young children. The parents of children enrolled in first or second grade in 1991 report that 28 percent of these children received nonparental home-based care by relatives on a regular basis[2] prior to entering first grade. In addition, about 27 percent had received home-based care from nonrelatives (table 1).[3]

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Table 1.–Percentage of first and second graders who received nonparental, home-based child care by relatives and nonrelatives on a regular basis prior to starting first grade, by parents' highest level of education[1]: 1991

Characteristic	Children (thousands)	No relative care used		Relative care used			
				in own home[2]		in other home	
		percent	s.e.[3]	percent	s.e.[3]	percent	s.e.[3]
Relative Care							
Total	7,547	71	.8	10	.5	18	.7
Parent's highest education[1]							
less than high school	791	71	2.8	12	1.8	16	2.1
high school/high school equivalency	2,393	66	1.6	11	1.0	23	1.4
vocational/technical or some college	2,288	67	1.3	12	.9	22	1.2
college graduate	1,051	80	1.8	8	1.2	12	1.5
graduate or professional school	947	83	1.5	8	1.5	9	1.2
no parent in household	78	76	7.7	6	3.7	18	6.8
		No nonrelative care used		Nonrelative care used			
				in own home[2]		in other home	
		percent	s.e.[3]	percent	s.e.[3]	percent	s.e.[3]
Nonrelative Care							
Total	7,547	73	.8	6	.5	21	.6
Parent's highest education[1]							
less than high school	791	90	1.7	3	1.1	8	1.4
high school/high school equivalency	2,393	78	1.3	4	.7	18	1.0
vocational/technical or some college	2,288	69	1.2	5	.7	26	1.2
college graduate	1,051	67	2.2	8	1.3	24	2.0
graduate or professional school	947	63	2.3	11	1.6	26	2.0
no parent in household	78	88	6.0	4	2.7	8	4.9

[1] Highest level of schooling completed by either parent/guardian in the household or the only parent/guardian in the household.

[2] Includes those in own home as well as those in both own and other home.

[3] Standard errors were estimated using a jackknife replication method.

NOTE: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), spring 1991.

For both types of care, the care was most often provided in a home other than the child's. Among children receiving care from relatives, this translates to 36 percent having received care in their own homes while 64 percent received such care in other homes. For children receiving nonrelative care, 22 percent of these children received care in their own homes compared with 78 percent in another home.[4]

Receipt of both relative and nonrelative child care varied by the parents' educational level. Children whose parents had less than a high school education were more likely to have received care from relatives than children whose parents had more formal education. For example, a higher percentage of children whose parents had less than a high school education (28 percent) received care from relatives compared with 20 percent of children whose parents completed college. Nonrelative care was more common among children with at least one parent completing vocational or technical school or some college (31 percent) compared with 11 percent of children whose parents had less than a high school education.

Daycare Centers and Nursery Schools

The NHES survey also collected information on attendance in two types of center-based preschool programs: daycare centers and nursery schools. The majority of the first and second graders (71 percent) attended center-based programs (excluding kindergarten) prior to first grade. Of these children, about 48 percent had attended nursery school only; about 21 percent had attended a daycare center only; and about 31 percent had attended both a daycare center and a nursery school.

There is a clear relationship between parents' highest level of education and children's center-based experiences. Children whose parents had a high school education or less, and particularly those whose parents did not complete high school, were more likely to enter first grade without a center-based experience (table 2). Approximately one-half (53 percent) of children in families where no parent had completed high school and 34 percent of children in families where the highest level of education was high school had no center-based program experience prior to first grade. In contrast, only 16 percent of children in families where one or both parents had graduate or professional school experience entered first grade with no center-based program experience.

Kindergarten Programs

Kindergarten experience is nearly universal. Among first and second graders, only two percent did not attend kindergarten (table 3).[5] However, the nature of this experience is quite variable. The most common type of kindergarten program attended was part-day kindergarten in a public school; about one-half (51 percent) of first and second graders attended this type of program. One-third (33 percent) had attended full-time public kindergarten. Fewer children attended kindergarten in private schools; 7 percent attended full-day and 7 percent attended part-day.

Children whose parents had more than a high school education are less likely to attend full-day public kindergarten than children whose parents had a high school education or less. For example, children whose parents had completed vocational or technical school or some college (31 percent) had attended full-day kindergarten at a lower rate than children whose parents had a high school education (38 percent) or had not completed high school (45 percent). The percent of children attending private kindergarten increases as parental education increases. Children whose parents had less than a high school education or a high school education are less likely to attend private kindergarten (3 percent and 8 percent, respectively) compared with children whose parents completed vocational or technical training or some college (16 percent), were college graduates (20 percent)

Table 2.–Percentage of first and second graders who attended a daycare center and/or a nursery school[1] on a regular basis prior to starting first grade, by parents highest education[2]: 1991

Characteristic	Children (thousands)	Attended daycare center not nursery school		Attended nursery school, not daycare center		Attended both		Attended neither	
		percent	s.e.[3]	percent	s.e.[3]	percent	s.e.[3]	percent	s.e.[3]
Total	7,547	15	.6	34	.8	22	.7	29	.7
Parent's highest education[2]									
less than high school	791	8	1.5	27	2.5	11	1.9	53	3.2
high school/high school equivalency	2,393	15	1.3	32	1.3	18	1.3	34	1.7
vocational/technical or some college	2,288	17	1.1	31	1.3	27	1.5	25	1.1
college graduate	1,051	16	1.7	40	2.2	23	1.9	21	2.1
graduate or professional school	947	12	1.5	48	2.6	23	2.0	16	1.4
no parent in household	78	18	8.2	29	9.1	19	9.1	34	13.7

[1] Includes children enrolled in nursery school, prekindergarten, and Head Start.

[2] Parent's highest education refers to the highest level of schooling completed by either parent/guardian in the household or the only parent or guardian in the household.

[3] Standard errors were estimated using a jackknife replication method.

NOTE: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), spring 1991.

Table 3.–Percentage of first and second graders who attended kindergarten programs, by program type and by parents' highest education[1]: 1991

Characteristic	Children (thousands)	Kindergarten type								Did not attend kindergarten	
		Public				Private					
		full day		part day		full day		part day			
		percent	s.e.[2]	percent	s.e.[2]	percent	s.e.[2]	percent	s.e.[2]	percent	s.e.[2]
Total	7,547	33	1.0	51	1.2	7	.4	7	.4	2	.3
Parent's highest education[1]											
less than high school	791	45	3.0	47	3.0	1	.4	2	.8	4	1.2
high school/high school equivalency	2,393	38	1.7	52	1.8	4	.5	4	.6	2	.4
vocational/technical or some college	2,288	31	1.6	52	1.8	8	.7	8	.8	1	.4
college graduate	1,051	23	1.9	56	2.7	11	1.3	9	1.3	1	.5
graduate or professional school	947	23	2.1	50	2.9	14	1.6	11	1.9	2	.9
no parent in household	78	46	11.5	39	8.6	8	4.6	6	3.7	1	1.4

[1] Highest level of schooling completed by either parent or guardian in the household or the only parent or guardian in the household.

[2] Standard errors were estimated using a jackknife replication method.

NOTES: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding. If a child attended more than one type of kindergarten, questions were asked relative to the most recently attended kindergarten.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), spring 1991.

or completed graduate or professional school (25 percent).

Survey Methodology and Data Reliability

The 1991 National Household Education Survey (NHES) is a telephone survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Data collection took place between February and April of 1991. The sample is nationally representative of all civilian, noninstitutionalized persons in the 50 States and the District of Columbia. This sample was selected, and the data collected using random-digit-dialing (RDD) methods and a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology.

Two different survey instruments were used to collect data on 3- to 8-year-olds. The first instrument, a household Screener administered to an adult member of the household, was used to determine whether any children of the appropriate ages lived in the household and to collect some other general household information. For households with children in the eligible group, an Early Childhood Education (ECE) interview was conducted with the person most knowledgeable about the care and education of the 3- to 8-year-old in the household. If more than one eligible child lived in the household, an ECE interview was conducted for each.

Response Rates

The NHES survey completed Screeners with 60,314 households, of which 10,317 contained at least one child between 3 to 8 years old eligible for the survey. The response rate for the Screener was 81 percent. The completion rate for the ECE interview, or the percent of interviews conducted, was over 94 percent. Thus, the overall response rate for the ECE interview was 76.3 percent (the product of the Screener response rate and the ECE completion rate). For the NHES, item nonresponse (the failure to complete some items in an otherwise completed interview) was very low. The item nonresponse rate for the variables in this report are less than 1 percent. When preparing estimates for this report, item nonresponse was treated as missing data. This is equivalent to assuming equal distributions for both respondents and nonrespondents.

Data Reliability

Estimates produced using data from the NHES are subject to two types of error, sampling and nonsampling. Sampling errors occur because the data are collected from a sample rather than a census of the population. Nonsampling errors are errors made in the collection and processing of data. Both are discussed below.

Nonsampling Errors

Nonsampling error is the term used to describe variations in the estimates which may be caused by coverage, data collection, processing, and reporting procedures. The sources of nonsampling errors are typically problems like unit and item nonresponse, the differences in respondents' interpretation of the meaning of the questions, response differences related to the particular time the survey was conducted, and mistakes in data preparation.

In general, it is difficult to identify and estimate either the amount of nonsampling error or the bias caused by this error. However, in the NHES survey, efforts were made to prevent it from occurring, and to compensate for it where possible. For instance, during the survey design phase, which entailed over 500 hours of CATI instrument testing and a pretest with over 200

households, efforts were made to check for consistency of interpretation of items, and to eliminate ambiguity in items.

An important nonsampling error for a telephone survey is the failure to include persons who do not live in households with telephones. About 90 percent of all 3- to 8-year-olds live in households with telephones. Estimation procedures were used to help reduce the bias in the estimates associated with children who did not live in telephone households.

Sampling Errors

The sample of telephone households selected for the NHES is just one of many possible samples that could have been selected. Therefore, estimates produced from the NHES sample may differ from estimates that would have been produced from other samples. This type of variability is called sampling error because it arises from using a sample of households with telephones, rather than all households with telephones.

The standard error is a measure of the variability due to sampling when estimating a statistic.[6] It indicates how much variance there is in the population of possible estimates of a parameter for a given sample size. Standard errors can be used as a measure of the precision expected from a particular sample. The probability that a complete census would differ from the sample by less than one standard error are about 68 out of 100. The chances that the difference would be less than 1.65 times the standard error are about 90 out of 100; that the difference would be less than 1.96 the standard error, about 95 out of 100.

Standard errors for all of the estimates are presented in the tables. These standard errors can be used to produce confidence intervals. For example, an estimated 22 percent of children attended both a daycare center and nursery school. This figure has an estimated standard error of 0.7 percent. Therefore, the estimated 95 percent confidence interval for this statistic is approximately 21-23 percent.

All differences cited in the text of this report are significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

ENDNOTES

[1]This report contains preliminary estimates from the survey.

[2]Data were collected on care provided on a regular basis; respondents were asked not to include occasional babysitting.

[3]Some children received both relative care and nonrelative care prior to entering first grade, so these percentages are not additive.

[4]These percentages are not reported in Table 1 and were recalculated using as the base just those children receiving care from relatives/nonrelatives.

[5]Most estimates of kindergarten attendance are based on current year enrollment (i.e., Current Population Survey). The NHES estimates reported here represent children's attendance in kindergarten prior to their enrollment in first grade.

[6]Standard errors for statistics presented in this report were estimated using a jackknife replication method.